

## Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman



### Background to Kuala Lumpur

This brief introduction provides the context for the Heritage Trails, which focus on pre-war buildings. Kuala Lumpur had its origins in the 1850s when the Malay Chief of Klang sent Chinese upriver to open new and larger tin mines. They landed at the confluence of Sungai Lumpur (now Gombak) and Sungai Klang and established mines at Ampang. Later, tin mines were opened at Pudu and Batu.

This trading post was a wild frontier town plagued by floods, fires, disease and the Selangor Civil War (1870–73). During this time, Kapitan Cina Yap Ah Loy emerged as a leader, responsible for the survival and growth of the town. In 1880, in view of its strategic location, the Selangor state capital was moved from Klang to Kuala Lumpur. Nothing of this earlier period remains as all structures were of wood and *atap* (thatch) which were destroyed in the fire and subsequent flood of 1881.





Thereafter, Frank Swettenham, the British Resident of Selangor who was instrumental in the development of the town, required that buildings be constructed of brick and tile. The advent of the railway increased accessibility. The development of buildings intensified in the 1890s so that it warranted the establishment of the Sanitary Board. In 1896, Kuala Lumpur was chosen as the capital of the newly formed Federated Malay States.

The multiracial community of this period settled in various sections of town. Market Square, east of Sungai Klang, became the commercial centre for the whole town. The Chinese congregated around this Square and south into Chinatown. To the north, across Java Street (now Jalan Tun Perak), were the Malays. Nearby, a number of Indian *Chettis* (money-lenders), and in later years Indian Muslim traders, set up business. West of the river, the Padang (now Merdeka Square) was the focal point of the British administration.

Kuala Lumpur continued to grow despite two World Wars, the rubber and tin commodity crash and the State of Emergency (1948–60) during which Malaya was preoccupied with the communist insurgency. In 1957, the Federation of Malaya gained its independence from British rule. Kuala Lumpur remained the capital through the formation of Malaysia, achieving city status in 1972, and was established as the Federal Territory in 1974.



**Key**

-  buildings of interest
-  sungai (river)
-  light rail transit station
-  street activity



## Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman

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Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman (Jalan TAR) was originally called Batu Road. It was so named because it began as a track leading to Batu where there was the village, limestone caves and tin mines. The road is now named after the nation's first Yang di-Pertuan Agong (Paramount Ruler).

By the 1930s, the swamps, rice fields and coconut estates around Batu Road were replaced by commercial development which created one of the town's busiest streets. Historically, and still evident today, the property owners, builders, traders and commercial operators along this road were an ethnically diverse group. There were Malays, Indians (Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus), Sri Lankans, Chinese and British. Every type of commerce is still represented: retailer, wholesaler, restaurant, hawker, service, hotel and movie theatre.

The buildings along Jalan TAR reflect the changing trends in architectural design. They provide clues as to the period of construction, such as the Utilitarian (1900s-1910s), Neo-classical (1910s-1930s) and Art Deco (1930s-1940s) styles and the various forms of post-war buildings.

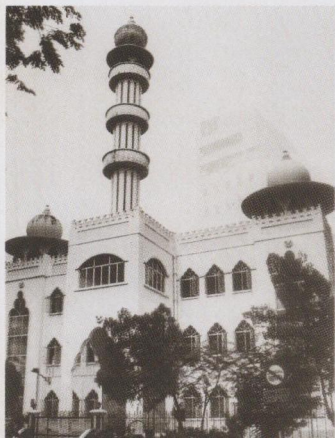
The Malay settlements of Kampung Rawa and Kampung Java were located in the area to the east, and to the north of Java Street (now known as Jalan Tun Perak). The community comprised mainly immigrants of Bugis, Rawa, Javanese, Mendeling and Minangkabau extract. They typically worked as farmers and conveyors of goods by boat, bullock cart and bus. The headman of the Malays was the Dato Dagang, the most well-known of whom was Haji Tahir. He shared authority with Kapitan Cina Yap Ah Loy when the latter was leader of the Chinese community. The population of Kampung Rawa, where Masjid India is situated, has changed over time from being predominantly Malay to Indian Muslim.

On this walk, we pay tribute to the family-run pre-war businesses on Jalan TAR and the Masjid India neighbourhood. Their presence in the midst of modern-day shopping complexes reflect the changing nature of Jalan TAR as Kuala Lumpur develops.



# 1 Masjid India

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Masjid India (India Mosque) began in 1863 as a wood and *atap* hut. It was located near Sungai Klang which provided water for the ablutions prior to prayers. In 1945, it was rebuilt to accommodate a congregation of 1,000 worshippers.

This site was later gazetted in October 1964 as a “reserve for

a mosque”. As a result, a new Mosque which could accommodate a congregation of 3,500 was constructed here. Its opening in 1966 was officiated by the Sultan of Selangor. Apart from an initial grant of RM75,000 from the Federal Government and RM25,000 from the Selangor State Government, the bulk of the funds for the building was donated by the Indian Muslim community.

The Mosque, built in the southern Indian style, is a three-storey structure with onion-domed *chattris* (open-sided umbrella-shaped cupolas) and arch windows with Islamic motifs. The single minaret is topped by a *chatri*. It has vertically-striped ventilators intersected by balconies. The first floor is a prayer hall reserved for the men and the second for women. General assemblies are held on the ground floor.

At the time the site was gazetted, a Board of Trustees was appointed by the South Indian Muslim Musjith (sic) Committee to maintain the Mosque. While the operational costs of other mosques are subsidized by the Government, this is a private institution supported primarily by members’ contributions and public donations. The members elect the *imam* (leader of prayer), the *nazir* (administrator) and committee which manages the Mosque. Service is conducted in Arabic and Tamil languages. The current *imam* was elected in 1991, taking over from his father who had served for 25 years.



## 2 Jalan Melayu

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Jalan Melayu was known as Malay Street because of the strong Malay presence here in the past. It was filled with Malay spice factories, Indian bakeries and Chinese bicycle shops. A prominent property owner from the 1870s was Haji Mohamed



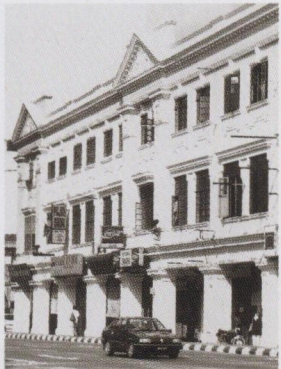
Eusop bin Abubakar, a sea captain from Terengganu who made his fortune as a rice trader. He invested his fortune in a number of properties in Kuala Lumpur, including Jalan TAR. On Jalan Melayu, he owned shophouses Nos 23-35, which he had built in the Utilitarian-style.

Today, some of these shops are occupied by Indian wholesalers, interspersed with Indian restaurants. One such wholesaler is the **Goodluck Trading Company**, which distributes soft furnishings, Malaysian batik and *pelikat* (woven cotton worn as *sarongs* by men). This Hindu company started in 1895 on Jalan TAR and moved here in 1965.

## 3 No 1-19 Jalan TAR

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This block of buildings exhibits fine examples of Neo-classical features. In 1915, Loke Yew, a property owner, millionaire and philanthropist, constructed No 11-19, and in 1920, Haji Eusop's estate built No 1-9.



Although constructed at different times, the buildings share the same architectural style and complement each other. Giant order pilasters supporting highly decorative pediments punctuate the façade. Bay windows adorn the first floor and the block is unified by the cornice treatment. Large rectangular piers form part of the covered five-foot way. The façade is embellished with plaster scrolls and emblems.



## 4 PH Hendry

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Across the street are two buildings, which are one of the most elaborate Neo-classical shophouses on Jalan TAR. The façade includes two large fluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals. An interesting feature is the additional gable on the roof behind the pediment. The segment with the pediment has a bay window on the first floor and an elegant Venetian window above. It has fine

plaster decorations, including a star and crescent motif, which signifies Muslim influence.

Occupying these premises is **PH Hendry**, which is an appointed Royal Jeweller to the states of Negeri Sembilan, Selangor and Kelantan. Initially, the craftsmen and stones came from Sri Lanka, but now the jewellery is designed in the workshop upstairs by local artisans.

The Hendry dynasty was founded by PH Dines Hamy, who first opened **Ceylon Bakery** on Jalan Melayu. His son PH Hendry started the jewellery business in a corner of the Bakery in 1902. In the 1920s, PH Hendry moved his jewellery operations to Jalan TAR and relocated to this site some years later.

In 1954, the Bakery operation moved here and was once again in the same premises as the jewellery shop. It operates at the rear of the building and, while catering mainly to family and friends, also serves walk-in clients. Both retail enterprises have remained in the family for four generations.

## 5 No 8, 32, 42 and 106 Jalan TAR

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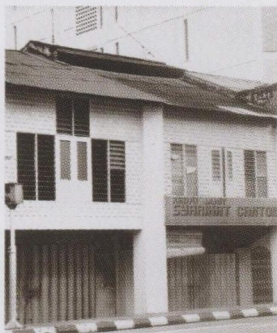
Old timers who grew up on the street can recall hotels, barber shops, bakeries, a coffee shop or two, laundry, blacksmith, flour mill, and shops selling books, stationery, spices, textiles and carpets. While many of the businesses have disappeared or relocated elsewhere, some old trades are still evident.



They are housed in the two-storey shophouses built as far back as the 1900s. Typically in these shophouses, the shopkeepers ran their operations in the “shops” on the ground floor and lived in the “houses” upstairs. Shophouse No 8 represents the earliest form of Utilitarian architecture. The first floor has a single opening which is covered with simple wooden shutters. The elevation of the building is quite low with a steeply sloping roof as well as a jack roof, which provides additional ventilation.

Four family-run businesses from the 1930s and 1940s are still in existence.

**Syarikat Canton** started as a tailoring shop servicing the Chinese miners around the town and was established at this location in 1934. Pok, the original owner, obtained his professional qualification through a correspondence course from England. In the old days, the clients included judges, lawyers and engineers from the nearby courts and electricity sub-station.



**Bhagwansingh Melasingh**, a Sikh merchant, came from India around 1934 to start his wholesale trade. His children practically grew up on the street as the family lived above the shop until 1957. The store wholesales and retails spices, condiments and sundry food items. It distributes QBB (Queensland Buttery Board) Pure Ghee, a well-known brand of clarified butter from Australia.

**Kean Leong & Co**, a Chinese engineering tools supplier, was cited in the *1929 Malaya Directory* as an agent for Dunlop tyres, Sun motor cycles, Varta batteries and Crescent Star bicycles. Jalan TAR has been its home throughout its long history.

At 22 years of age, **GS Gill** started his business in 1945 by importing bicycles, IXL jam and Camel cigarettes. Originally operating from a two-storey shophouse, it now occupies its own twelve-storey premises. Today, the company is a well-known sports goods wholesaler and retailer, with a branch in Singapore.



## 6 Coliseum Cinema

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Chua Cheng Bok, a well-known Chinese businessman and property developer, built this structure and leased it to a group of gentlemen who opened this cinema in 1921.

Constructed of reinforced concrete, with a double roof and numerous fans, the building was one of the coolest places in town. The wide verandahs upstairs, the balcony seats and private

boxes were tastefully fitted with separate fans and lights, to cater to the patrons' comfort. The Coliseum had its own power plant, making it independent of the town system.

This Neo-classical building with its stuccoed façade addresses the corner beautifully. Note the verandahs which have since been enclosed.

In the 1930s, one could watch *bangsawan* (Malay opera) performed by itinerant troupes. Since the 1940s, the cinema has catered to moviegoers interested in Malay and Hindi films. These movies are advertised through colourful hand-painted billboards. As late as 1992, painting canvas banners by hand was still a widespread practice and a skill that was passed on from one generation to the next. The artistry of the whole process is now computerized.

## 7 Coliseum Café

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**Coliseum Café** was built in 1921. It offered *thé dansants* (tea dances) every Wednesday at 6pm and was a popular watering hole for Colonial planters, miners and traders. Amongst its famous patrons in the past was Somerset Maugham, the English author. Today, Lat, the well-known Malaysian cartoonist, still drops by occasionally.

The special atmosphere of yesteryear is retained with its unchanged décor and furnishings, and white linen-clad waiters. Serving mainly English cuisine,



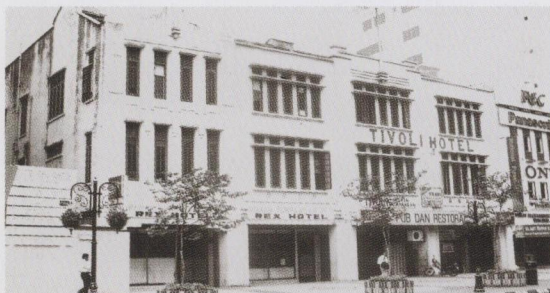
the menu has remained largely the same. The only addition is the baked crab, which was introduced some 20 years ago. Many of the dishes are still cooked over charcoal and firewood stoves.

The building has a Neo-classical design with rusticated arches at ground level. Note the plaster festoons above the windows, cornice patterns and the well-preserved original terazzo of the five-foot way. The gable wall has a jack-roof façade, which lends grandeur to this shophouse. Art Deco elements were later added, such as the wood and glass shopfront and the door lintels with the carved Café logo.

## 8 Rex & Tivoli Hotels

Art Deco architecture had its origins in Europe and America in the mid-1920s but was not introduced to Malaya until the late 1930s. Typical Art Deco features include the abstraction of the façade into strong horizontal and vertical elements. Shanghai plaster was used to achieve the same visual result as the more expensive stone used abroad.

This block of four buildings are fine examples of







Art Deco architecture, featuring stuccoed façades, stepped gables, flagpoles, vertical fluting and tall windows.

**Rex Hotel** was started in 1941 by a group of Hainanese shareholders. The hotel was popular with the Colonials. In the restaurant are the original furnishings including the visitors' board. Hainan Chicken Rice is the speciality of the restaurant.

Manager Lim Hong Wan is one of eight partners who started **Tivoli Hotel** next door in 1938. Like the Rex, it operates as a budget hotel. The restaurant downstairs is leased out to an operator serving *nasi kandar* (rice and curry speciality of the Indian Muslims from Penang).

## 9 No 150-164 Jalan TAR

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The Art Deco style is continued in this block as can be seen in the flagpoles, flutings, and gables. Cantilevered window shades provide variation.

While other Chinese, Indian and Japanese enterprises used to operate here, however, only a few tenants from the 1940s have remained.

In 1941, **KS Gill**, a 26-year-old Sikh civil servant from Singapore, came to Kuala Lumpur on a holiday. He liked the town so much that he decided to set up as a specialist, selling and servicing pens and other writing instruments.

Yip Kar Yew started **Wing Sun & Co** in 1939 as a sign-maker who introduced neon lights, awnings, venetian blinds and plastic signs to the town.

**KK Kafeteria** began as a coffee shop, which was



started by Wong See Kong in 1939. In 1949, it became a hotel and milk bar, popular with British soldiers. The hotel was closed in the 1960s and KK expanded the restaurant business into food catering.



## 10 Odeon Cinema

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Built by the Cathay Organization in 1936, the **Odeon Cinema** was an expression of the links between the innovations of cinematography and Art Deco.

AO Coltman was the architect and Steen Sehested prepared the reinforced concrete design. The building featured new safety designs such as emergency lighting and fire prevention systems for the projector room. State-of-the-art ventilation grills and exhaust fans enhanced air circulation. The foyers were laid with locally produced rubber flooring.

There are strong Art Deco elements such as the lettering style of the cinema name, vertical pylons and flagpoles. Above the entrance, a horizontal beam, embellished with a mosaic depicting drama, comedy and music, intersects the strong vertical mullions. On the side façade, "ribs" create a vertical rhythm.

Odeon Cinema operated as a movie theatre until November 1997 and is now an arcade selling clothes, magazines, electronic goods and snacks.

## 11 Lee Wong Kee

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This is one of the oldest surviving family-run Chinese restaurants in Kuala Lumpur. Founded by Lee Wong Kee in 1926, it first operated from a shophouse at No 203 Jalan

Tun HS Lee. When offered this one-storey bungalow, Lee moved the restaurant here. The spacious grounds contributed to the success of the restaurant, allowing large parties to be held in comfort.





## 12 Services and Retailers



A fine block of Neo-classical buildings elegantly turns the corner of Jalan Dang Wangi and Jalan TAR. It is believed that Loke Yew developed some of the buildings in this block. The estate of Loke Wan Yat, a son of Loke Yew, still owns shophouses No 235 and 233 at the corner.

The traditional services and retailers which have remained include **China Arts** and **Peiping Lace** (curios), **Pang Woo** and **City Hotel** (lodging houses), **Ban Seng** and **Capital Café** (coffee shops) and **C Nang Hong** (musical instruments).

**Kee Huat Radio** was established in 1939 in this town as a radio dealer and distributor. It also imported the HMV (His Master's Voice) gramophone.

**Bokhara Carpet House**, above Peiping Lace, is easily identifiable by the carpets hung out on display. The shop was opened here in 1952 when the owner came over to Malaya from Amritsar in India. It deals only in hand knotted carpets from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey.

**Capital Café** was established in 1959 by a group of five partners. This is a traditional coffee shop with its marble top tables and bentwood chairs, and bread toasted over a charcoal fire. Like any typical Malaysian coffee shop, Capital Café serves local coffee in a number of ways – with condensed or evaporated milk, mixed with tea and milk, hot or iced.

**C Nang Hong** has been a pioneer local company in the musical and piano trade since 1940. It was the first Malaysian company to assemble pianos locally as well as to train the visually handicapped in piano tuning and servicing.

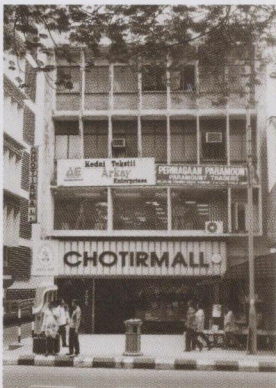
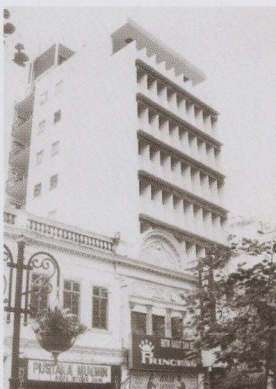
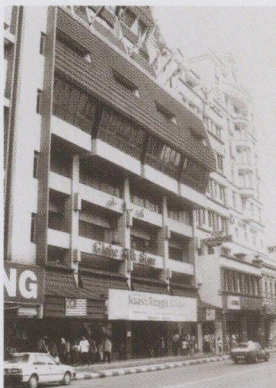
### 13 Globe, P Lal and Chotirmall

These three family-run companies have anchored the traditional textile and garment industry on Jalan TAR.

**Globe Silk Store** started out in 1930 as a small shop in Segamat, Johor by Tirithdas Jethanand. The Kuala Lumpur branch was opened in 1947 at No 7 down the road and moved to this site in 1977. Globe is a household name in Malaysia for its "value-for-money" goods. The company has also grown to include insurance services, property development and apparel manufacturing.

BP Doshi, the founder of **P Lal Store**, started selling materials house to house, first on bicycle, then on tricycle and finally by car. In 1929, he opened a silk store on this street and relocated here in 1980. P Lal Store is famous for its gent's tailoring, men's shoes and winter clothing.

Established by three brothers from Sind, India, **KAJ Chotirmall** first opened in Jakarta in 1887. The Kuala Lumpur shop was established in 1957. Branches were variously opened throughout Asia, including Singapore, Saigon, Hong Kong, Yokohama, Shanghai, Tsintao, Port Arthur and Phnom Penh from 1882 to 1971. Many of these, casualties of wars and changes of government, have since been closed. However, Chotirmall still has branches throughout Southeast Asia.





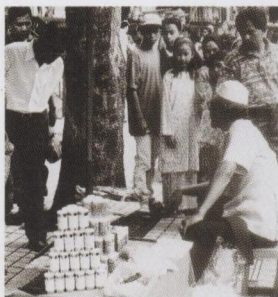
## 14 Around Jalan Masjid India



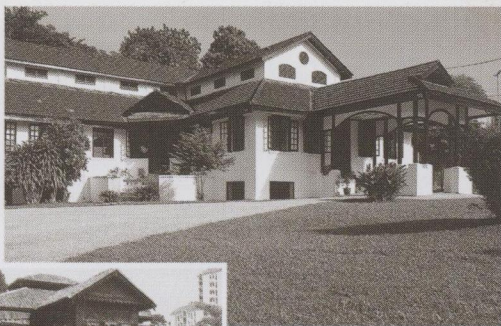
Across from the Coliseum Theatre is an alleyway, which leads from Jalan TAR and Lorong TAR to Jalan Masjid India. It is lined with barber shops, cobblers, tailors and stalls selling scarves. Lorong TAR is a pedestrian mall which is transformed into a street market every Saturday evening.

This thriving neighbourhood around the Mosque is often referred to as "Little India" due to its numerous wholesale and retail Indian traders. This area is a recent development from the 1960s. Prior to this, Lorong TAR was known as Batu Lane, which was the heart of an infamous red-light district comprising a maze of squatter shacks nicknamed *Belakang Mati* (Dead End). Malayan and Selangor Mansions were built in the neighbourhood to accommodate the squatters when they were cleared out in the mid-1960s.

Today, Jalan Masjid India is lined with Indian shops selling perfumes, spices, incense, saris, brassware and jewellery, and Malay shops specializing in batik, *songkok* (headgear for men), prayer mats and robes. The street is lively, with a heady mixture of colour, aroma and sounds. There are flower vendors, food



and souvenir stalls, buskers and blind musicians. Among the more interesting vendors are the Malay medicine men plying *jamu* (herbal concoctions) and brews that allegedly can cure all ailments. Budget hotels and restaurants, which serve Indian and Malay food, abound in this area.



The Kuala Lumpur  
Heritage Trails is a  
collaboration between

Tourism Malaysia and Badan Warisan Malaysia (Heritage of Malaysia Trust). The Badan is a non-profit non-government organization. It was established in 1983 with the objective of promoting the preservation and conservation of Malaysia's built heritage.

The heritage centre of the Badan is located in a mock Tudor building dating from 1925. In the garden is a bamboo hut built by Orang Asli of the Temiar community and a restored Malay timber house known as the Rumah Penghulu. This was formerly the residence of a local headman in Kedah. It is beautifully decorated throughout with intricate carvings and has been furnished to reflect a house in the early thirties. A guided tour and viewing of a video documentary on the restoration is available.

The centre hosts regular exhibitions with a heritage theme and has a gift shop and reference library. Visitors are very welcome.

Badan Warisan Malaysia is located at No.2 Jalan Stonor, 50450 Kuala Lumpur.

Tel 603 244 9273

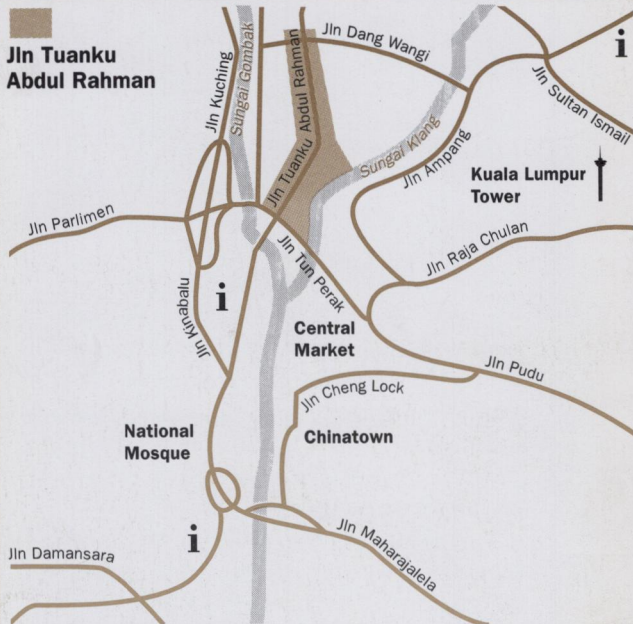
Fax 603 245 7884

*Open Monday to Friday,  
10am to 4pm*



**BADAN WARISAN** MALAYSIA





## **i** Tourist Information Centres (TIC)

Tourism Malaysia Head Office  
17, 24-27 & 30th Floor Menara Dato' Onn  
Putra World Trade Centre  
45 Jalan Tun Ismail  
50480 Kuala Lumpur  
Tel: 603 293 5188  
Fax: 603 293 5884

E-mail: [tourism@tourism.gov.my](mailto:tourism@tourism.gov.my)  
URL <http://tourism.gov.my>

Malaysia Tourist  
Information Centre (MATIC)  
Tel: 603 264 3929  
Fax: 603 262 1149

TIC Plaza Putra  
Tel: 603 293 6664

TIC Kuala Lumpur Railway Station  
Tel: 603 274 6063

TIC Putra World Trade Centre  
Tel: 603 441 1295